XV
BUDDHIST *VIPASSANA* MEDITATION

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1. Types of Mental Development or Meditation (*Bhavana*)

The Pali word ***'bhavana'*** means **development** or cultivation. In the Scriptures, it denotes the practical methods of mental development or meditation. There are two kinds of *bhavana*, namely:

(a) *Samatha Bhavana* or Tranquillity Meditation

'*Samatha*' means tranquility, which is the concentrated, unshaken, undefiled and peaceful state of mind. It is called calm because it calms down the five hindrances (*nivaranas*) including passions. When the mind is deeply concentrated on the object of meditation, all the hindrances such as **sensual desire, ill-will, sloth & torpor, restlessness & remorse, and sceptical doubts** are absent from the mind which is absorbed in the object. When the mind is purified from all these hindrances, the meditator feels calm, tranquil, happy and peaceful. The result of *Samatha* meditation therefore is some degree of happiness through the attainment of deep concentration (***samadhi***) such as **Access (*Upacara*)** or **Fixed (*Appana*)** Concentration called ***Jhana*,** but it does not enable a meditator to rightly understand the bodily and mental phenomena as they really are.

(b) *Vipassana Bhavana* or Insight Meditation

The Pali word ***'Vipassana'*** is derived from two words: 'Vi' which means 'in various ways' and 'passana' which means 'seeing'. Thus ***Vipassana*** means '**seeing in various ways**' and when applied to meditation, it refers to seeing all objects or phenomena as **impermanent** (*anicca*), **suffering** (*dukkha*) and **non-self** (***anatta***). The principle of *Vipassana* meditation is to observe, any mental or physical process that arises predominantly within the present moment. Thus the concentration is not fixed on a single object but the **momentary concentration (*khanika samadhi*)** that arises when the mind is free from the hindrances. At this stage, the mind is able to note whatever objects that arise predominantly, thereby revealing their **true nature (*yathabhuta*).**

2. Objects of Meditation in *Samatha* Meditation

As consciousness cannot arise without an object, we need suitable objects for mental development. The object of meditation is called '***kammatthana***' literally meaning **'working ground**' for the mind. Unlike ***Vipassana*** where the object is **real** and possesses the marks of impermanence, suffering and non-self, in ***Samatha*** the object is a fixed, unchanging concept which induces the mind to be absorbed in it thereby attaining *samadhi* or concentration. The Buddha prescribed forty objects for tranquillity meditation. They comprise the following seven classes:

- **10 *Kasinas*,** namely: Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Blue, Yellow, Red, White, Space, and Light. *Kasina* means 'whole' or 'complete.' It is so called because it should be observed wholly in meditation.

- **10 Loathsome Objects**, namely, 10 kinds of human corpses.

- **10 Recollections**, namely: recollection of the Buddha, *Dhamma*, *Sangha*, Morality, Liberality, *Devas* or Deities, Peace, Death, 32 Parts of the Body, and Breathing.

- **4 Divine Abidings**, namely: Loving Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, and Equanimity.

- **4 Formless Realms**, namely: Realm of Infinite Space, Infinite Consciousness, Nothingness, and Neither Perception nor Non-Perception.

- **1** Perception of the Loathsomeness of Food.

- **1** Analysis of the Four Elements.

In terms of inducing concentration, the meditation objects are of two kinds; those that induce only **access** (***upacara***) concentration and those that induce both access and **fixed** (***appana***) concentration or *Jhana.* Of the forty subjects, ten are capable of inducing access concentration only, namely: the first eight Recollections, Perception

of the Loathsomeness of Food and Analysis of the Four Elements. The other thirty can induce fixed concentration or *Jhana.*

3. Purpose of *Vipassana* or Insight Meditation

The purpose of *Vipassana* Meditation is to attain the cessation of suffering through rightly understanding bodily and mental processes and their true nature. For this, we need some degree of concentration. This concentration can be attained through constant and uninterrupted mindfulness of body-mind processes.

So here, we come to understand the difference between *Samatha* and *Vipassana* meditation. The purpose of *Samatha* meditation is to attain peace and happiness through deep concentration. So a *Samatha* meditator has to lay stress on concentration of mind. For this, he needs only a **single, fixed object** to concentrate on. On the other hand, a *Vipassana* meditator has to lay stress on the **right understanding** of body-mind processes and their **true nature**. So, whatever bodily or mental process that arises must be observed as it is. Thus we have a **variety of objects** of meditation. In fact, any physical and mental process can be the object of meditation. The purpose and results of *Samatha* and *Vipassana* meditation are different. So the methods are also different.

4. Role of Mindfulness in *Vipassana* Meditation

Vipassana meditation is also known as Mindfulness meditation because this type of meditation was taught by the Buddha in the *Satipatthana Sutta* or the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. The Pali word ***'Sati'*** means 'mindfulness or awareness of what is happening in one's body & mind at the moment' while ***'patthana'*** means 'setting firmly or closely'. So *Satipatthana* means firm, close, steadfast

establishment of **mindfulness** on the **present phenomenon** which one is observing; not events that have passed away nor events that have not arisen.

As ***Sati*** **or mindfulness** plays the key role in *Vipassana* meditation, it is important to clearly understand what *Sati* is, in terms of its characteristic, function, manifestation and proximate cause.

- The **Characteristic** of *Sati* is ***'apilana'*** which is **'not floating away'** from the object. What is meant is that *Sati* does not stay on the surface and float away but sinks and penetrates into the object. Thus in *Vipassana* meditation, one must note the object attentively and precisely to sink into it. Superficial noting may make the mind more distracted and float away.

- The **Function** of *Sati* is ***'asammoha'*** which is **'non-confusion'** with regard to the object. This means that the noting mind should neither lose sight nor be forgetful of the object that is under observation. The noting mind keeps tracking the object without any miss.

- The **Manifestation** of *Sati* is ***'visayabhimukha'*** or **'coming face to face'** with the object. This means *Sati* sets the mind to be directly face-to-face with the object so that one can see the object clearly and be able to distinguish its distinctive features. Another manifestation of *Sati* is ***'arakkha'*** or **'guarding'.** *Sati* protects the mind from defilements. No defilement can enter when there is *Samma Sati* (Right Mindfulness). It is like closing the door to defilements just as one closes the window from wind and rain.

- The **Proximate Cause** of *Sati* is ***'thirasanna'*** or **'steadfast perception'**. The stronger the perception of the object with regard to its characteristic such as heat, cold, hardness, tension, etc., the stronger the *Sati* will be. It means to know or to recognize the object as it is, in its true nature.

5. Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*Satipatthana*)

In the *Satipatthana Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikaya*, the Buddha described the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, which is Right Mindfulness as follows: "*Here bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating the* ***body as a body,*** *ardent, fully aware and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating* ***feelings as feelings,*** *ardent, fully aware and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating* ***mind as mind,*** *ardent, fully aware and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. He abides contemplating* ***mind-objects as mind-objects****, ardent, fully aware and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world*".

- According to the commentary, **'*bhikkhu*'** is a term for a person who practises the *Dhamma* to be liberated from the cycle of birth and death.

- The contemplation must be accompanied by three factors: ardent or **strong effort**, **clear comprehension** and **mindfulness.**

- The contemplation must be free from covetousness and grief, which stands for **sensual desire and ill-will**, the principal hindrances that must be overcome for the practice to succeed.

Altogether there are **21 sections** or subjects taught by the Buddha:

Contemplation of the Body is classified into 14 sections:
1) Mindfulness of Breathing (*Anapanasati*)
2) The Four Postures: Standing, Walking, Sitting, and Lying Down
3) Clear Comprehension of Daily Activities
4) Repulsiveness of the 32 Parts of the Body
5) The Four Material Elements
6) – 14) Nine Cemetery Contemplations

15) **Contemplation of Feelings** is classified as one section.

16) **Contemplation of Consciousness** is classified as one section.

Contemplation of *Dhammas,* Mind Objects consists of 5 sections:
17) Five Hindrances
18) Five Aggregates
19) Six Internal and Six External Sense Bases
20) Seven Factors of Enlightenment
21) Four Noble Truths

6. Practical *Vipassana* Meditation

(a) Morality

Before a person begins to meditate, he must observe morality to refrain from unwholesome speech and action. In a meditation retreat, the observance of the **Eight Precepts** enables one to have more time to devote to meditation and not busy oneself with unnecessary activities such as beautifying oneself or indulging in any kind of entertainment. The Eight Precepts also contain abstentions from food after mid-day, sexual contact and the use of luxurious beds and chairs, to curb our sensual desires. When the Eight Precepts are fully observed, our moral conduct will be purified. Purification of moral conduct or *sila vissudhi* is the **pre-requisite** of a meditator to make progress in meditation. When *sila* if purified, the mind becomes wholesome and steady and can easily focus on the object of meditation leading to deep concentration, which in turn gives rise to insight wisdom in meditation.

(b) Sitting Meditation

The Buddha suggested that either a forest place under a tree or any other **quiet** place is suitable for meditation. The meditator should sit

comfortably with legs crossed in an upright position, not too stiff but **relaxed**. It is important to choose a position that is **comfortable** for a long time because to achieve peace of mind, the body must be at peace. For those with back problems, sitting on a chair is quite acceptable. The meditation is done with the **eyes closed.**

For the meditation object, the most commonly taught in Malaysia is the **rising & falling** movement of the abdomen. This abdominal movement is ***vayo-dhatu*** (wind element). When we breathe in, the abdomen rises; when we breathe out, the abdomen falls. In this way, we follow the rising & falling movements and direct our attention on them by making a **mental note of** ‘rising, falling’, ‘rising, falling’. The 'rising, falling' movement is called the **primary object**, meaning the starting object, and the meditator must not be attached to it. When other objects become more prominent such as thinking or wandering mind, we must mentally note 'thinking, thinking' or 'wandering, wandering' until the thinking or wandering stops. After the mental processes have ceased, the noting mind naturally returns to the primary object, the abdominal movements. The same technique of noting should also be applied to **all other bodily or mental phenomena** when they become more predominant than the 'rising, falling' such as stiffness, itchiness, pain, anger, joy, sleepiness, etc.

(c) **Mental Noting (Labeling)**

Mental noting or labeling is very useful in meditation. This means to **say mentally the word** of that which one is experiencing in the body and mind at the present moment. The words one uses are not as important as the mindfulness itself. If one is able to observe or be aware of any phenomena **without analyzing, thinking or judging**, then one may drop the noting and just observe. We note objects as long as they are **predominant**, i.e. until they are displaced, change or disappear. For example, a pain may be noted for half an hour or so. A desirous thought might be noted 20 or 30 times by mentally noting 'desire, desire', before it fades away.

(d) **Walking Meditation**

In a retreat, it is standard practice to **alternate** periods of sitting meditation with periods of walking meditation of about the same duration, usually an hour, one after another. Walking meditation is practised with the eyes open, looking not at one's feet, but at the floor two meters in front, keeping the head down to avoid the tendency to look around and become distracted. Hands should be held in front or at the back with palms joined to avoid swinging the arms during walking. The meditator should choose a lane **twenty paces long** and walk slowly back and forth along it.

Before walking, the meditator should **note 'standing'** by focussing on the pressure on the feet, the tightness of the legs supporting the standing posture. Next, he should **note the intention** to walk. Walking meditation consists of paying attention to the walking process. If one is moving fairly rapidly, make a mental note of the movement of the legs, 'Left, right, left, right'. If one is moving more slowly, note the **lifting, pushing and dropping** of each foot. When concentration becomes stronger, one should **slow down** further to note more steps such as lifting, raising, pushing, dropping and touching of the foot on the floor. During walking, attention should be **focused on the foot** so that one becomes aware of the sensations such as lightness, heaviness, motion, hot, cold, etc. Do not look at the feet or visualize th**em** in your mind while you are noting the movements or sensations. Notice what processes occur when you stop at the end of the lane, when you stand still, when you turn and begin walking again.

As in sitting meditation, the mind can be invaded by **thinking** or wandering during walking meditation. The **meditator should stop** walking the moment he realizes this, and note the thinking or wandering until it stops. After the **thinking process has ceased**, the meditator may resume walking. In daily life, walking meditation can be very helpful. A short period of say, 10 minutes of walking meditation before sitting, serves to focus the mind. Beyond this advantage, the mindfulness developed in walking meditation is useful to us as we walk from place to place in the course of a normal day.

(e) **Daily Activities**

Mindfulness of daily activities is the **very life** of a meditator. The faculty of mindfulness becomes powerful by constant and uninterrupted **awareness of every mental and physical activity** throughout the day's practice, while failure to note daily activities creates wide gaps of non-mindfulness. The **duty** of a *Vipassana* meditator is to be mindful the moment he wakes up and throughout the day. He should try to be mindful when changing his clothes, brushing his teeth, washing the face, urinating, defecating, drinking water, opening and closing doors, stretching the hands, eating, drinking, bathing, washing clothes, etc. In fact, the mindfulness of daily activities is **crucial to the success** of *Satipatthana Vipassana* meditation because the yogi will always be **mindful of body and mind** throughout the period he is awake, which is what *Satipatthana Vipassana* meditation is all about.

At **Chanmyay Yeiktha** Meditation Centre in Yangon (**Note 1**), yogis are asked to take 4 or 5 activities each day and perform them extremely slowly, noting mindfully all the mental and material processes throughout and report what they observed. The objective is to make it a habit to be **patient and mindful** and in this way, concentration will develop and the yogi will make good progress. During a retreat, all one has to do is to be mindful. There is **no need to hurry**. One should **not talk** unless absolutely necessary and this must be minimal. One should **not do reading or chanting** as they hinder one's progress.

7. Benefits of *Vipassana* Meditation

In *Anguttara* iv, 391, the Buddha spoke on the fruits of different meritorious deeds, with each yielding greater fruit than the previous one starting from *dana,* to taking refuge, to keeping precepts, to the practice of loving kindness and finally to the **practice of insight yielding the greatest fruit.** In *Dhammapada* 113, the Buddha said

that a single day's life of one who comprehends how all things rise and pass away is better than living a hundred years without such comprehension, namely the insight into the quick arising and passing away of bodily and mental processes, called ***udayavyaya nana.***

According to the Buddha, there are seven benefits to be derived from practising *Satipatthana Vipassana* Meditation, namely:

i) **Purification** of a being from all defilements
ii) Overcoming of **sorrow**
iii) Overcoming of **lamentation**
iv) Overcoming of **physical suffering** or bodily pain
v) Overcoming of **mental suffering** or mental pain
vi) Attainment of **Path and Fruition Knowledge**
vii) Attainment of ***Nibbana***

In the Discourse on the **Foundations of Mindfulness** (*Satipatthana Sutta*) in *Majjhima Nikaya* No. 10, the Buddha assured that: "If anyone were to develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for 7 years, one or two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return."

"Let alone 7 years, if anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for 6 years…for 5 years…for 4 years…for 3 years…for 2 years…for 1 year, one or two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return."

"Let alone 1 year, if anyone were to develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for 7 months…6 months…5 months…4 months…3 months…2 months…1 month…half a month. One or two fruits could be expected for him: final knowledge or if there is a trace of clinging left, or non-return."

(Note: Final knowledge is *Arahantship*, non-return is the stage of the *Anagamin*).

8. References

1) Vipassana Meditation Guidelines by Chanmyay Sayadaw Ashin Janakabhivamsa. Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre, Yangon
2) Guidelines for *Vipassana* Meditation -- Instructions by Sayadaw U Janakabhivamsa complied by Venerable Sujiva.
3) A Successful Retreat or How to Make Progress Whilst Retreating by Venerable Dhammarakkhita of Dhammodaya Myanmar Vihara, South Africa.
4) In This Very Life. The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha by the Venerable Sayadaw U Pandita.
5) Buddhist Meditation in Theory and Practice by Venerable Paravahera Vajiranana Mahathera.

9. Explanatory Notes

Note 1: '**Chanmyay Yeiktha**' in Myanmar means 'peaceful retreat'. Chanmyay Yeiktha Meditation Centre was established in 1971 by **Most Venerable Chanmyay Sayadaw Ashin Janakabhivamsa.** It functions mainly as a meditation centre but is also a monastery with local and foreign monks and nuns. It caters to all *Satipatthana Vipassana* yogis, Myanmar and foreigners alike. The main centre is located at **55-A, Kaba Aye Pagoda Road, Mayangone Township, Yangon 11061, Myanmar**. Foreigners are well catered for in a new 4-storey building complete with living quarters and meditation halls separately for male and female yogis. Two healthy meals are served daily, one at dawn, the other before noon; fruit juice or soft drinks are offered in the evening. Vegetarian food is available on request. Clean, safe, hot and cold drinking water is supplied.

Besides the Yangon centre, there is also a Chanmyay centre at **Hmawbi**, located in a cool and quiet farming region about an hour's drive to the north of Yangon. It is situated on about 17 acres of lush gardens with many large shady trees and bordered by small typical Myanmar villages. The Hmawbi centre is proving to be very popular and successful as more and more monks, nuns and lay people from all over the world arrive each year for long intensive practice of *Satipatthana Vipassana* meditation in a very conducive environment. Both these centers are truly great places to practice *Satipatthana Vipassana* Meditation under the guidance of very skillful and compassionate teachers.